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Reagan Meets With Sen. Tower of Texas As Contenders for Cabinet Posts Emerge

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WASHINGTON—As Ronald Reagan continued to acquaint himself with the nation's capital, leading contenders emerged for several top Cabinet posts in his administration.

The President-elect held a half-hour meeting yesterday with one of them, Sen. John Tower of Texas, amid reports he may name the 55-year-old conservative Republican as Defense Secretary.

Associates of Mr. Reagan said other front-runners for Cabinet positions include:

—William French Smith, 63, Mr. Reagan's personal lawyer and business trustee, to be Attorney General.

—Former Treasury Secretary William Simon, 52, to occupy the post he held under Presidents Nixon and Ford.

Reagan aides emphasized that the President-elect hasn't made final decisions on any Cabinet appointments. "He hasn't signed off on anybody yet," said one aide. But they said he is close to making decisions on nominees to head the departments of Defense, Treasury and Justice. Others said that former Treasury Secretary George Shultz is the leading contender for Secretary of State.

Mr. Reagan has received a list of recommended Cabinet appointees drawn up by his 19-member "kitchen cabinet," headed by Mr. Smith. That group of close associates is to meet again Saturday in Los Angeles. Mr. Reagan plans to return there tomorrow, and thus will have further opportunity to discuss Cabinet choices with these advisers.

Mr. Reagan's schedule yesterday left little time for Cabinet picking. Besides his session with Sen. Tower, the President-elect received a national security briefing from Carter administration officials, lunched with GOP House and Senate members, paid an unusual courtesy call on the Supreme Court Justices, and held a private meeting with Massachusetts Sen. Edward Kennedy. The liberal Democrat, who unsuccessfully challenged President Carter for their party's presidential nomination, requested the meeting. Last night, Mr. Reagan scheduled a dinner with Republican Senators and their spouses.

While Mr. Reagan spent a second full day wooing official Washington, speculation

continued to mount on his Cabinet choices.

Mr. Smith, a trusted Reagan confidant, is considered almost a sure bet as Attorney General. However, his appointment is likely to raise anew the question of whether a President should select a personal and political associate as the top U.S. law enforcement officer. Most recent Presidents have done so, but this sparked a controversy after Richard Nixon's Attorney General, John Mitchell, was convicted for his role in the Watergate scandal.

Mr. Simon, who has worked hard for Mr. Reagan the past couple of years, likely will be tapped to head the Treasury Department. However, the hard-driving, demanding manager irritates some influential Republican advisers to Mr. Reagan. Former President Ford, for instance, favors economist Alan Greenspan over Mr. Simon for Treasury Secretary.

Sen. Tower only recently emerged as the likely choice for Defense Secretary. A proponent of a stronger U.S. military presence, the lawmaker has been expected to take over as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. If Sen. Tower is chosen for the defense post, Texas Gov. William Clements might name former Treasury Secretary John Connally to his Senate seat.

Although Mr. Shultz is the rumored front-runner to head the State Department, the Bechtel Group executive is reported to be reluctant to re-enter government service. Other contenders for Secretary of State include Alexander Haig, former commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and former Budget Director Caspar Weinberger.

"Likely" or "most likely" appointees to other Cabinet posts are emerging, as well. Illinois Agriculture Director John Block is viewed as a top contender for Agriculture Secretary. Under consideration for Secretary of Health and Human Services is Elizabeth Dole, a former Federal Trade Commission member who is married to Sen. Bob Dole (R., Kan.); for Transportation Secretary, Drew Lewis, prominent Pennsylvania Republican and Reagan aide; for Commerce

Secretary, Republican National Chairman Bill Brock; for Interior Secretary, former Wyoming Republican Sen. Clifford Hansen, and for Energy Secretary, Rep. David Stockman (R., Mich.).

Mr. Weinberger, another Bechtel executive, may be asked to be director of the Office of Management and Budget, the post he held under President Nixon. And William Casey, chairman of the Reagan transition office and a former chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, is the leading candidate to be director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Today, Mr. Reagan is to meet with President Carter in the Oval Office at 2 p.m. EST while his wife, Nancy, gets a tour of the White House residence from Rosalynn Carter.